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## **“Mixity” in Urban Policies directed towards Informal Settlement Areas in Damascus, a Concept for Public Decision?**

**Valérie Clerc**

Urban Observatory for Near East, French Institute for the Near East  
Institut français du Proche-Orient - Ifpo, Damascus, Syria.

[v.clerc@ifpoorient.org](mailto:v.clerc@ifpoorient.org)

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### **Abstract**

*Since the Syrian President Bachar al-Assad took office in 2000, liberalization induced together an important high-income property development and a large expansion of informal settlements areas in Damascus. At the same time, informal settlements have increasingly featured in the political agenda. Two main approaches can be simultaneously identified: a citywide rehabilitation and regularization of informal settlements and a citywide redevelopment of these areas. What is the role of urban mixity in the public decisions concerning informal settlements? Both approaches encourage mixity, but in different ways, considering either the social and functional qualities of informal settlements to encourage or the partition of the city in segregated areas to avoid. However, mixity is not the main argument for public decision. Competition for land, dominant urban representations or, more recently, urgent social reorientation in a burning regional context play a much more dynamic roles to guide public decisions.*

**Keywords :** Informal settlements, urban policies, rehabilitation, renewal, Damascus

### **Introduction**

Social and spatial changes have been undertaken very quickly in Damascus since President Bachar al-Assad took office in 2000. The liberalization of the economy attracted national and international investments and induced important high-income real-estate development (Clerc and Hurault 2010). In addition to the increased housing demand connected to the inflows of refugees from Iraq fleeing the war as early as 2003, the prices of the real estate reached new heights. This newly constructed housing, medium and upscale market, has, however, stayed empty or is unfinished, the most significant demand for housing coming from the low-income households. During this period, the informal settlement areas continued to expand, providing housing for near 40% of the metropolitan area's population in 2004 (Government of Syria, 2010).

Since 2005, Syria has adopted a social market economy, aiming to combine a high growth rate with social justice, in a sustainable way. Regarding city planning and housing, Syrian reforms combine liberal and social logic, in order to, at the same time, attract private investments to the real-estate market and re-launch the construction of social dwellings to limit the expansion of the informal settlements. Urban policies adopted sustainable development principles; density, compactness, energy saving and mixity are the new slogans. In parallel, the informal settlements have increasingly taken a place on the political agenda. In

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Damascus, the current policies are looking to integrate these areas, areas considered as marginal. Many programs, policies and projects are under study or are work in progress for more than ten years. They adopt different positions towards these informal areas. Two main approaches can be identified. A citywide rehabilitation and regularization of informal settlements is promoted through laws, a national policy and some local programs. In the meantime, other laws and projects try to attract investors to initiate a citywide redevelopment of informal settlements, including the relocation of the current residents, onsite or not.

The social question underscores these efforts in various forms in order to justify these policies. The ambition of social changes underlying these urban interventions is usually obvious when it is an intervention in the informal settlements (Clerc 2002). The question of homogeneity or heterogeneity of the city and of the districts is linked to the social representation that technical and political protagonists of the city planning have in their minds. In Damascus, the programs show a diversity of approaches toward the existing informal settlements, between rehabilitation and urban renovation, carried by protagonists who do not all have the same intentions nor the same vision. Which orientations and which rearrangement of the space are directed at and projected in these programs? What is the proportion of urban mixity in public decisions concerning informal settlement areas? This article proposes to show the recent evolution of policies regarding informal settlement in Damascus, the social views and visions that fuel them and the role played by the concept of social mixity in the different urban planning approaches present in Damascus today.

### **The Informal Settlements in Damascus: Integrated Areas in the City**

The informal settlement areas of Damascus can be considered as the downside of the city planning and the Syrian property and housing policies of the last fifty years (Clerc 2010). Considered, as early as the 60s, as the challenge for housing policies, these areas have expanded since the 70s, as a result of the national and international migration waves due to the rural exodus and regional conflicts. Since the 1980s, the sprawl of illegal construction has developed in greater force, with the inadequacy of urban planning rules, the sustained demographic growth and the acceleration of the rural exodus (Baridi 2005).

Today, even if they are recognizable within their urban forms, the informal settlements areas of Damascus remain difficult to define, to quantify and to locate with precision. Two main words are used to name them: *ashuqyyat* (anarchic) or *mukhalafat al-jamia* (a collective infraction). The legal definition of the marginality of these areas refers primarily to the illegality of the buildings and not to the areas themselves. The *mukhalafat* buildings (illegal buildings) are the buildings built without licence (*al-bina al-mukhalef*), which are the most common cases in the informal areas, or are buildings not in compliance with the building permit (*al-mukhalafat al-bina*), which are more often the cases of infractions in the formal areas (closing a balcony, raising the height of a building, adding a sloping roof, etc.). To designate the informal settlement areas, we speak commonly of collective infraction areas (*al-manateq al-moukhalafat al-jamia*).

#### *Several Forms of Infractions, In- and Outside of The Informal Settlement Areas.*

The legal definition of the infraction (*mukhalafat*) has been re-evaluated over time. From 1960 to 2003, a building in violation was a building built outside the limits of a master plan, a building built on public or private lands belonging to the state, but also the ugly or structurally unsound buildings (according to an appropriated commission). From 2003, the law added the buildings built in unsuitable areas, or expropriated, and the buildings that did not comply with the building code or the licence. In 2008, the law eliminated the judgemental standard of ugliness and increases the jail sentences for all people involved in the construction of such buildings. Now, the definition of infraction concerns a large majority of the building in the city in the formal areas as well as in the informal areas; in the informal areas it is mainly for buildings built without a permit.

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The property statutes differ from one district to another. We can identify two main situations. The informal areas located on the slopes of Mount Qassioun, towering over the city in the northwest, are predominately State lands, and have been squatted by the first occupants (property and building infractions). The settlement areas in the farmlands of the Ghouta, the oasis surrounding the Southeast of Damascus, are on land belonging officially to their occupants. These lands have been bought then divided illegally by the owner or by an informal developer then sold in lots (only the construction is illegal). The other property specific situations are more rare, such as squatting on private or mortmain property (*waqf*).

With no available census of the unlicensed buildings, the estimation of the number of dwellings in the informal settlement areas has to be based on the 2004 national census that has counted dwellings without regular property title (*tabo nizami*), because this title can only be acquired with a building permit. The figures show that approximately 40% of the city's residents live in the informal settlement areas. Today this represents about 1.6 million inhabitants in an agglomeration of 4 million.

### *Urban Forms from Traditional Inspiration*

The second term that designates the informal housing, *ashuayyat* (anarchic) defines the same areas but refers above all to the buildings built without respecting the urban rules, particularly those that have been built in the construction prohibited areas outside the limits of the master plans (where the land, farmland are less expensive than the developable lands). The word *ashuayyat* refers to the non-compliance of these urban forms - main characteristic of these districts. While the rules and city planning schemes impose the construction of the new districts with wide streets, large plots (most of the time a minimum of 300m<sup>2</sup>) and prospect rules that usually stipulate separation between the buildings, the informal settlement areas present small plots (70 to 150m<sup>2</sup>), narrow streets (3 to 5 metres), no set back from the street, adjoining buildings and mainly buildings of lower height (1 to 6 stories, usually 2 or 3). The majority of the dwellings in these districts are individual (traditional and popular housing) rather than apartments.

These informal settlement areas were not created in an anarchic fashion, but were organized along a different path from the modern urban rules. These areas usually create homogeneous urban fabrics, related to those describing the outskirts of Damascus during the XIX century (Lena 2008; Arnaud 2006), in its aspects of urban morphology, installation processes, street hierarchy and densification of the population. Thanks to this particular urban form, we can locate these areas on the satellite pictures and map their location.

These two main characteristics, illegality and non-compliance to the urban standards are the major reasons for which all the urban planning protagonists of Damascus are considering these areas as impossible to keep as they are. In their opinion, these infractions and inappropriate urban forms should disappear.

### *Districts Relatively Integrated into the City*

Today the Syrian informal settlement areas are quite well integrated into the city based on other characteristics, which set them completely apart from most of the informal settlements in the world. The Syrian informal settlement areas are almost entirely built in cement and/or cement perpend with reinforced concrete structure. Moreover, these districts are quite well and legally served by public infrastructures. In 2004, the city of Damascus' informal settlement areas were served with water distribution systems (97%), electricity (98%), sanitary sewers (98%), garbage collection and paved streets (al-Dayiri 2007). Although insufficient in number and size, the public authorities built schools and hospitals in the districts. However, despite the seemingly high percentages, these districts have a less access to the basic services and infrastructures compared to the rest of the city, in particular the most newly

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built and those farthest from the city centre. In some districts, water reaches some districts for only a few hours per week, the schools are crowded and the public or green spaces are almost non-existent.

Besides, there is no clear gap between these districts and others. It is more a continuum. These districts provide a home for the low-income population of the city, but the urban poverty is not only concentrated in these geographical areas where the poor and the poorest live next to the middle class (Al-Laithy 2005). The accesses to housing in the formal and informal markets are linked and the prices of the dwellings can be similar. The rate of tenancy is the same in the entire city (12%) (Central Bureau of Statistics, 2004). Illegality of the construction also affects a large part of the formal buildings. All the inhabitants of these informal settlements are far from being rural migrants; they have often lived in urban residential areas, formal or informal, before moving to an informal settlement area, and many of them have lived in town for dozens of years.

However, these districts have an above average population density than the city average, in terms of housing occupancy rate, families per dwelling, persons per household and net density of inhabitants and dwellings. The result of a sampling in Damascus shows 130 dwellings and 690 inhabitants per housing hectare, more than double the average of the metropolitan area (62 dwellings and 258 inhabitants for the agglomeration). In some districts, we encounter more than 387 dwellings and 1200 inhabitants per hectare.

We are therefore facing a paradox. These areas, this small half of the city, although relatively well integrated into the city, mainly thanks to the public policies of infrastructure development from previous decades, is considered by almost all the urban protagonists as a urban mistake that needs to be corrected and is considered by the inhabitants as a relegation and poverty zone from where they should move out to avoid the concept of marginality associated with these areas (Salamandra 2010). The inhabitants, like the urban protagonists, recognize the qualities of these areas, and first amongst them, a quality of social life and a functional diversity, associated with an urban form that we find less often in the formal areas and that are related to the old city. Yet, only the imperfections of these districts, and the illegality and non-conformity based primarily on the urban norm, are considered when we try to find solutions.

### **The Contradictions of the Urban Policies Regarding the Informal Settlement Areas**

Historically, the urban policies regarding the informal settlements areas in Syria have tried to find a balance between rehabilitation, penalisation and destruction. The first law pertaining to the informal settlements in 1960 mandating the destruction of informal settlements has not been efficient and, at the end of the 1960s “ thousands of inhabitants (were) crowded in hovel lodgings and slums” (OADS 1969). Alongside the will to eradicate these districts, the State also considers the social aspects of the protection and amelioration of the living conditions. The crucial services of water and fountains have been provided since the 1970s. A presidential recommendation of 1975 advocated that informal buildings built of cement with a door and a window and covered with a reinforced concrete roof could not be destroyed without offering a dwelling in compensation. In 1979, even though it had the opposite effect than expected, a law regarding the urban sprawl was conceived to enable access to formal housing against the logical mechanism of property speculation of that time. In 1981, a decision by the Prime Minister to improve these districts and to help their integration into the city led to a policy of increased public facilities development and infrastructure during the 80s and 90s (Sakkal 1984, al-Baridi 2005). In the 1990s, the government acknowledges the development of these settlements as an integrated part of the urbanization process of Syria. In 1994, a pilot project in Damascus (in the districts of Dweila and Tabbaleh) ran by the ministry of Housing in collaboration with the UN had consequences at various levels until the beginning of the 2000s, including: reproduction of this improvement process in 14 other districts of Damascus, studies of other districts, media implications, consultation of cities involved and specific proposals to change the political and legislative framework (UMP 2001).

### *The Renewal of the Housing Policy*

The landscape of housing policy changes in the 2000s. With the acceleration of the economic opening due to the coming to power of Bachar al-Assad in 2000 and the adoption of the social market economy in 2005, the whole legislative framework of housing and city planning developed from the 1960s to the 1980s, has undergone a complete renewal that continues today: renewal of urban planning laws and the rents but also towards investments, the access to the property, the cooperatives, building permits, housing and land regularisation, and the building infractions (Clerc 2011).

These laws mostly favour the liberalisation of the real-estate sector. Several laws and many directives of the High Council of Tourism have been enacted in order to encourage national and international private investments, especially in the real-estate sector, to fill the gap between supply and demand. The social public interventions are however still on the agenda where the market does not reach this goal. Illustration of a strong come back of the public social housing production, the Public Establishment of Housing (PEH), one of the two largest providers of public housing (along with the Military Establishment of Housing) has relaunched its construction of public housing and reoriented its efforts toward the low income population, particularly the youth, key players in the development of informal settlements. More than 57 000 dwellings were planned around Damascus since 2000, more than the PEH has ever built in this area since its founding in 1961.

The results are uneven and do not meet demand. With these reforms and the favourable economic situation, formal private construction has been reinvigorated, increasing seven-fold in 2007 in the metropolitan area and 15 times in the suburbs (Central Bureau of Statistics 2001 to 2008). However, a large number of formal dwellings that have been built recently, mainly designed for upper income clients, remain empty or unfinished. Built as long-term investments, they do not meet the immediate housing demand that comes principally from low-income households. In addition, the yearly number of public dwellings built is until now proportionally low. Therefore, low-income households still invest in the informal settlements, which are still expanding despite the increased penalties for doing so. The most recent laws and policy are looking to limit the number of empty or unfinished dwellings (as Law 82/2010) and for the acceleration of social housing production (private sector involvement, public rental dwellings), but the tendency has not yet deflect here and the formal dwelling sector still does not meet the demand of low income households.

### *Conflicting Tendencies Face the Informal Settlement Areas*

The goals seem more confused as to the plight of the informal settlement areas. The last few years have shown several tendencies, organized around two poles: rehabilitation (improvement of existing) and renewal (destruction and reconstruction). While the pursuit of equipping the city with major road infrastructure still leads to the eviction from informal housing, an important number of laws, programs and projects have been implemented to deal with the question of informal construction. Among the main recent laws, there are those that forbid retaining new informal constructions (1/2003 and 59/2008). Other laws help the regularization of real estate in these districts, allowing for the division of land illegally divided into plots (33/2008) or helping to obtain a building licence for existing informal buildings under certain conditions (46/2204). In the same idea, the detailed master plans of the suburb cities have been dramatically redrawn since 2000 and their limits expanded to integrate the informal settlement areas.

A third type of law tries to increase the involvement of the private sector in these areas. This is the case with the law 15 of 2008, which allows and encourages real estate developers to build social dwellings and/or renovate the informal areas on public lands with the rehousing of the inhabitants (onsite or not).

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Private investors would receive enough public land - size and value - to make a profit from this operation (until now, the public lands proposed around Damascus were not informal settlement areas). Finally, a 2007 decree has enabled the consolidation of lands in the areas of collective infraction, with the possibility of having an investor that relocate or compensate the inhabitants (Directive of the Law 26/2000).

While these last laws were designed to promote urban renewal projects, several national programs of the Ministry of Local Administration are planning the rehabilitation of the informal settlement areas, and even their regularisation. The national program of Municipal Administration Modernisation in Syria (MAM 2005-2008), conducted with European cooperation, published reports that propose the rehabilitation and regularisation of the informal settlement areas. The Sustainable Urban Development Program (2007-2010), run with the German cooperation (GTZ, now GIZ) and the Governorates of Aleppo and Damascus, have started rehabilitation projects in the informal settlement areas (Aleppo) and have organised a conference, bringing together 110 Syrian cities, where rehabilitation recommendations have been issued (Syrian Arab Republic 2009). Finally, an Informal Settlements Upgrading and Rehabilitation National Programme is in the adoption phase: it plans provisions of infrastructure, judicial solutions for a sure and stable property market, and a programme of economic support for the inhabitants (Government of Syria 2010).

However, in the capital, while many of the current national and local policy program texts recommend the rehabilitation in situ of the informal settlement areas, the projects that are emerging are planning destruction of the existing settlements and their replacement by modern districts. These latest projects are in hold because the approaches have not yet stabilized in the capital region. While the Master Plan (1968) conceived by M. Ecochard & G. Bانشoya is still in force, the Damascus and Rif Damascus Governorates started studies in 2009 to realize respectively a new Master plan and a Regional Plan. The laws have been passed, the national policies exist but at the local level the projects already conceived are in hold and awaiting decisions have yet to be made.

### *Competing Visions*

The implementation of these programs and projects that sometimes even contradict one another, is the result of the diversity of views and diverging intentions (destruction, renovation, regularisation, rehabilitation, infrastructure), that are still being debated by the urban planning professionals and decision makers in Damascus and at the national level, and have not found yet a common meeting point. Of course, in the face of these informal settlement areas, the tools for the rehabilitation and the renovation will probably be used to complement each other's work. In Damascus, it is obvious for many that due to the large number of districts involved, finding the solution to a full renewal is both socially and economically unrealistic. Only a portion of these districts will be rebuilt, while others will be rehabilitated, or wait for a possible future renovation. The difference between the points of view is today defined more and more by the relative proportions of renovation and rehabilitation and what standards will determine the districts that will be subject to one or the other option. Many criteria are taken into consideration for diagnosis and policy orientation. The social, economical and environmental issues are huge: these areas host almost half of the city's population, many of these districts built on the oasis, some are on lands with potentially high real-estate values being close to the centre and exclusive districts. Depending on the view, these districts are either the housing solution for the greatest number of people, to improve, or they are deteriorated or misfit spaces to be recovered in order to re-establish the agricultural environment of the oasis or to build more prestigious urban developments.

### **Multiple Uses of the Mixity Concept**

The urban mixity plays an increasing role in the speeches of the various players. It is often associated with the concept of sustainable urban development, which has been widely adopted by the city planning

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protagonists and acts like a transformation stage for the different representations in urban planning and housing (Clerc 2011). Everybody agrees on the idea of a city without urban social segregation and organized by functional mixity with better proximity between working and living locations through mixed use (until now, the Syrian master plans have organized cities based on zoning principles). However, the notion is used as an argument in different ways for or against the informal settlement areas. Both approaches of rehabilitation and urban renewal encourage mixity, but in different ways.

### *Urban Mixity in Favour of Urban Renewal or Rehabilitation of Informal Settlements?*

The proponents of the rehabilitation of the informal settlements consider the existence of these districts in the heart of the city as an asset in favour of the social and functional mixity. They focus on the social and functional qualities of informal settlements to be rehabilitated and reject the redevelopment approach, due to its social and economic infeasibility, and because it would, in principle, end with the expulsion of low-income inhabitants from the city centre. For them, the relocation and the replacement of the existing population by a wealthier population resulting from this relocation would destroy the social mixity and the associated functional mixity that we find today in and around many informal settlement areas. These areas are usually inhabited by a low-income and middle class population and are often next to wealthier districts. Moreover, the social bounds are known to be stronger in these areas than in the rest of the city. A policy of urban redevelopment would reinforce the social high income homogeneity of the city centre and will eliminate low-income housing in close proximity of the city centre, and therefore eliminate the structure that is also limiting the pollution, the cost and the exhaustion that would be consequences of long-distance commutes (the main zones of employment are in the centre of Damascus).

The proponents of the redevelopment of the informal settlements seek to build integrated projects in these areas, while the current inhabitants could be relocated onsite (next to new upscale dwellings whose sale would finance the construction of their new housing) or not (the relocation onsite is limited by the high density of the informal settlements). They reject the rehabilitation approach for several reasons amongst which is the fact that it would endorse the partition of the city into segregated areas. The social and cultural homogeneity of these areas is a problem for them; they call it "self segregation". Predominantly, they base their point of view on the representations they have of the differences between inhabitants of these districts and the other districts, in terms of urbanity (the inhabitants would be rural migrants), culture (many would be refugees), poverty, social problems or even criminality. These differences would result in a spatially fragmented city. Re-housing and the transformation of the buildings and the image of these districts would break these "ghettos" by distributing this population in another way, while offering better living conditions in a healthy environment, based on a set of urban standards.

The different points of view are not always so simple or easily defined. For those that believe that a portion of the informal settlements should be rehabilitated and another part should be a project of urban renewal, the choice of districts to rehabilitate is based on a typology of these areas. The selection criteria vary according to the diagnostics applied and the objectives. Some consider that only the districts presenting physical dangers for the population (seismic zone, unstable ground, structurally unsound buildings) should be renovated or relocated. But others think an intervention in these districts is necessary because of some social, economical and cultural characteristics, including the "social danger" like gangs and drugs dealers, the lack of security, the poverty (improper use of lands of high property value) or the lack of urbanity (avoid rural way of life in the city).

### *The Different Meanings and Uses of the Concept of Mixity*

The social mixity in question therefore concerns itself first of all with the *socio-economical* mixity between the richest and the poorest. However, the proponents of rehabilitation are looking for the mixity of



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these populations, less for the benefit of their co-presence than for the opportunity to give access to dwellings near the centre of the city to low-income households, an opportunity made harder or even impossible if these areas were rebuilt to comply with standards. This is the issue of integrating the population in the city through rehabilitation and thereby avoiding their relegation to the periphery. It is more a question of offering access and proximity to the city and the corresponding employment opportunities, than creating social proximities. The factor of social mixity is thus related to the functional mixity factor but its goal is social. The defenders of urban renewal do not apply the socio-economical mixity factor as being of primary significance even when planning a relocation of the inhabitants onsite since for them, the visibility of poverty embodied by the informal settlement will disappear in a homogeneity of the urban form.

The social mixity is also concerned with the *socio-cultural* mixity. Although a policy of national unity prevents a formal recognition of the phenomenon, it is understood that a number of the informal settlements of Damascus provide a home for identifiable social groups such as ethnic or religious minorities (Kurds, Circassians, Druze, Christian) or refugees (Palestine, the Golan, Iraq). In some of the informal settlements, the population is particularly mixed but in others, the population coming from the same group creates enough homogeneity or is important enough to define the area (cultural or commercial practices, shop signs) (Doraï 2009). Many consider the most homogenous districts as enclaves, not integrated into the city. Some protagonists bring up the risk of ghettos. Therefore, creating mixity in the city will break these social enclaves. This factor leads to the urban renewal. Yet, other urban protagonists consider this socio-cultural homogeneity as a quality, because it means the upholding or the possible development of social cohesion or social ties (interactions, mutual aid, common religious or cultural practices). For them, the social tie may be an asset in order to set up a rehabilitation project.

Other social categorizations are also active, and these give a negative image to the districts. These representations therefore favour urban renewal. In these cases, the inhabitants of these districts are seen as rural people and everything should be done to help them return to their village, they are seen as non-urban people that can not be integrated into the city, are seen as people in situations of irregularity that should be punished by law or are even deemed as responsible for the disappearance of the Oasis of Ghouta and should therefore be relocated outside of these farmlands. There is no question here of promoting a mixity between populations but on the contrary, promoting a non-mixity with undesirable people, avoid their integration and move them away from the city.

## Conclusion

The *question* of social mixity is therefore an important factor in the reflection of informal settlement areas of Damascus. The concept governs classifications, diagnostics, and projects. But we can not talk about the *argument* of social mixity because the notion has several meanings and behind this word, several topics are tackled by the urban protagonists: integration of poor people in the city, lack of social segregation, urban cultural diversity, spatial fragmentation, social tie of proximity, social cohesion, management of the relations between persons and between groups in a urban society. Consequently, the reference of social mixity blurs the analysis, more than clarifies it, mixing several ideas, values and different diagnostics and justifying opposite urban policies. The reference of functional mixity has a shared meaning in Damascus, challenging the principle of zoning. The argument is today reinforced by the reference to sustainable development, in particular in reference to the limitation of the traffic. But the reference to the social mixity must still be clearly explained and debated in order to confront all points of view.

The multiplicity of current policies towards the informal areas of Damascus shows the very important social and economic issues that surrounded the fate of these areas and the growing importance of their handling in the eyes of the public power. It also shows a competition between urban policies around the

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fate of these districts, and also between various social representations, diagnostics, urban ideals and solutions. The question of social mixity with the different meanings it carries, fuels this competition. Socio-economical mixity arguments are often used *in favour* of the inhabitants, by the pro-rehabilitation. Socio-cultural mixity arguments are mainly used *against* the inhabitants, by the pro-urban renewal, as are legal and standards arguments.

However, even if it is widely applied, mixity is not the main basis for public decision. Other factors play much more dynamic roles in guiding public decisions regarding the maintenance or not of a low-income population in an always more valuable centre of the city and the rehabilitation or not of these neighbourhoods. Until now, the value of the occupied lands, have created a competition to monopolize the real-estate in the central zone and at the periphery of the centre, as much as the dominant urban pictures present in the mind of Syrian professionals and decision-makers who place the informal settlement on the negative side of the urban diagnostics, have argued in favour of an urban renovation for the majority of these districts. The financial and economical infeasibility to do this with limited resources is progressively generating the option of rehabilitation and the regularisation. Today, in the hot social and regional context of the Arabic word, the social and political impossibility to move the inhabitants of these districts plays an even more dominant role. In Damascus, without delay, the decision-makers reinforced the social dimension of speech and choice. They have recently adopted a new position towards the informal settlement areas in which the majority of these districts should now be subject of rehabilitation. The arguments of social mixity in their different forms have for now been defeated by the reality of the street.

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